IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF NORTH CAROLINA CHARLOTTE DIVISION 3:23-CV-00317-GCM

MARTIN LAFON INGRAM,)	
Plaintiff,)	
v.)	<u>ORDER</u>
COMMISIONER OF SOCIAL SECURITY,)	
Defendant.)))	

THIS MATTER is before the Court upon Plaintiff's Motion for Summary Judgment (Doc. No. 6) and the Commissioner's Motion for Summary Judgment (Doc. No. 13). After carefully reviewing those motions, supporting memoranda, and the pleadings, the Court enters the following findings, conclusions, and Order.

The Court finds that Defendant's decision to deny Plaintiff Social Security benefits is supported by substantial evidence. Accordingly, the Court will **DENY** Plaintiff's Motion for Summary Judgment; **GRANT** Defendant's Motion for Summary Judgment; and **AFFIRM** the Commissioner's decision.

I. PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The Court adopts the procedural history as stated in the parties' briefs.

Plaintiff filed the present action on May 25, 2023. Plaintiff assigns error to the ALJ's assessment of the opinions of his treating mental health providers. Specifically, Plaintiff asserts the ALJ (1) did not assess their opinions using the proper regulatory factors; (2) improperly relied on notations of stability, average intellectual functioning, and GAF scores; and (3) failed to assess how Plaintiff's symptoms would affect his ability to work. (Doc. 6 at 5.)

II. <u>DISCUSSION</u>

The Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) and § 1383(c)(3), limits this Court's review of a final decision of the Commissioner to: (1) whether substantial evidence supports the Commissioner's decision, *Richardson v. Perales*, 402 U.S. 389, 390, 401 (1971); and (2) whether the Commissioner applied the correct legal standards. *Hays v. Sullivan*, 907 F.2d 1453, 1456 (4th Cir. 1990); *see also Hunter v. Sullivan*, 993 F.2d 31, 34 (4th Cir. 1992) (*per curiam*). The District Court does not review a final decision of the Commissioner *de novo. Smith v. Schweiker*, 795 F.2d 343, 345 (4th Cir. 1986); *King v. Califano*, 599 F.2d 597, 599 (4th Cir. 1979); *Blalock v. Richardson*, 483 F.2d 773, 775 (4th Cir. 1972).

As the Social Security Act provides, "[t]he findings of the [Commissioner] as to any fact, if supported by substantial evidence, shall be conclusive." 42 U.S.C. § 405(g). In *Smith v. Heckler*, 782 F.2d 1176, 1179 (4th Cir. 1986), *quoting Richardson*, 402 U.S. at 401, the Fourth Circuit defined "substantial evidence" thus:

Substantial evidence has been defined as being "more than a scintilla and do[ing] more than creat[ing] a suspicion of the existence of a fact to be established. It means such relevant evidence as a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion.

See also Seacrist v. Weinberger, 538 F.2d 1054, 1056-57 (4th Cir. 1976) ("We note that it is the responsibility of the [Commissioner] and not the courts to reconcile inconsistencies in the medical evidence").

The Fourth Circuit has long emphasized that it is not for a reviewing court to weigh the evidence again, nor to substitute its judgment for that of the Commissioner, assuming the Commissioner's final decision is supported by substantial evidence. *Hays*, 907 F.2d at 1456; *see also Smith*, 795 F.2d at 345; *Blalock*, 483 F.2d at 775. Indeed, this is true even if the reviewing

court disagrees with the outcome - so long as there is "substantial evidence" in the record to

support the final decision below. Lester v. Schweiker, 683 F.2d 838, 841 (4th Cir. 1982).

The question before the ALJ was whether Mr. Ingram became disabled at any time. The

Court has carefully reviewed the record, the authorities, and the parties' arguments. The ALJ

applied the correct legal standards and his conclusion that Plaintiff was not disabled is supported

by substantial evidence.

III. ORDER

NOW THEREFORE IT IS ORDERED:

1. Plaintiff's Motion for Summary Judgment is **DENIED**; Defendant's Motion for

Summary Judgment is **GRANTED**; and the Commissioner's decision is **AFFIRMED**.

2. The Clerk is directed to send copies of this Memorandum and Order to counsel for

the parties.

Signed: March 8, 2024

Graham C. Mullen

United States District Judge